**God’s Solution to Failure** Isaiah 43:16-44:5 bible-sermons.org July 26, 2015

I have a friend who thought he had fallen too far from grace. For a time he felt he had denied the Lord by his life to the extent that he had forsaken his salvation and was beyond hope. If you’ve ever felt that way or know someone who does, our passage today is for you!

The first half of this chapter promised deliverance for those who were going to be in captivity. God declared that none could stop Him from His plan (Isaiah 43:13). That plan was for Israel to be His witnesses in the earth, along with the Suffering Servant who would come from among them (43:10). God was going to bring deliverance and salvation so that the world would know “I am He.” That is to say the God of Israel is the one true, eternal, and sovereign God of all creation (43:15).

The chapter continues with God declaring His ability to bring the remnant of Judah back to the Promised Land. *16  Thus says the LORD, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, 17  who brings forth chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:* Isaiah 43:16-17 YHWH parted the Red Sea (Exodus 14:21-22) and the Jordan at flood stage (Joshua 3:16-17). Could we not also see in verse 16 Jesus walking on Galilee as appears to be the case in the first half of this chapter (John 6:19-20)? How rich is God's Word that it speaks in so many ways at once!

God is comforting the future captives by reminding them what He has done before when their ancestors were captives in Egypt. If God could make a way for a nation to cross a sea and destroy the army of Pharaoh that pursued them, why shouldn’t they have faith that God could do the same with Babylon? Why shouldn’t we have faith that He can set us free from the captivity of sin?

In fact, God liberated the captives by making a path for the army of the Persians to enter Babylon by inspiring the Persians to divert the river that ran under the city. God literally made a way in the mighty water’s river bed. Babylon’s army was defeated by a tidal wave of Persian soldiers. Whether supernatural or natural, it is all God, the sovereign One.

18*“Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old.* Isaiah 43:18 The captives in Babylon will not have to look back on the exodus from Egypt for inspiration. They will have their own exodus from Babylon that will be just as miraculous. We look back on God’s work in our lives in the past to encourage us, until He does something new and greater.

*19 Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.* Isaiah 43:19 In the deliverance from Egypt they fled from a rebellious Pharaoh. God provided a miraculous solution to an impossible situation. Now God would provide deliverance from Babylon by raising up a heathen king who would fight for them and even finance their return.

Which is more miraculous, the parting and closing of the Red Sea, or moving the heart of a king to do God’s will? Seems like a toss up to me. Both are impossible with man. If you’ve struggled with your own heart in serving the Lord, imagine the miracle it would take to move the heart of a king to serve anyone other than himself! God made a way in the wilderness of a king’s heart and streams in the desert of his soul.

*20 The wild beasts will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches, for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people,* Isaiah 43:20 Just as God provided for the Jews that wandered forty years in the wilderness, so God would provide for those Jews returning to the Promised Land. He would move the wild beasts of heathen people to honor God. They would, by a king’s edict, give tax money for the restoration of Jerusalem against their will (Ezra 6:3-5; 8-10). Where there seemed no way and no provision, God provided from their bestial enemies and from the heart of heathen king.

You may not see any way for God to bring you out of your captivity to sin (John 8:34). You may think your desert is too dry to have any hope of surviving spiritually. You can’t do it. You don’t have the resources, but God does! We’ll see how at the end of the passage. Just like He miraculously provided for them, He can provide for you, if you will look to Him and cast yourself completely on Him.

Follow Jesus’ lifelong example of surrendering His will to the Father. It wasn’t a sudden decision in the Garden of Gethsemane that caused Jesus to say, “Not my will but yours be done (Luke 22:42).” That was His daily life. If it’s your daily life, when that crucial moment comes in your life, by God’s grace you will continue to follow your life’s pattern.

*21 the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise.* Isaiah 43:21 Why was God being so merciful to this people whose fathers had been so rebellious? They were His chosen. He formed them for Himself that they might declare His praise. Is that not who you are? (John 15:16) Is this not what we are called to do, to declare His praise (Isaiah 42:10)? But are we? Having experienced His deliverance from the destructive bondage to habitual sins (John 8:36), let your heart be filled with gratitude for saving you from that life by seeing where it would have led you. Declare His praise to others. That gives them hope that they can be set free as well.

I hope you all understand what I’m referring to. The Apostle Paul writes of being delivered from this present evil age (Galatians 1:4). If you are a servant of sin in your life, it will rob you of the relationship you could have with Jesus. It will keep you from the joy you could know. In the end, it will destroy you physically and spiritually. Don’t believe the lying promises of sin. They never deliver and will cost more than you know. God formed you for Himself, so that you could declare His glory. If any human asked you to declare their glory, we would know it would be from a heart of selfishness. But when God says it, we know it is only right and comes out of a heart of love that desires our best.

*22 “Yet you did not call upon me, O Jacob; but you have been weary of me, O Israel!* Isaiah 43:22 The Jews had the history, the writings, and an abundance of opportunity and yet they would not call upon the Lord and be saved (Romans 10:13; Joel 2:32). Instead they grew weary of God through their ingratitude and indifference. What a warning for us! I meet people who are tired of going to church. That is because they are just going to a building. How can you grow tired of fellowship with believers and sharing testimonies of God at work in your life and hearing testimonies from others? How can you grow weary of worship of the One who loved you enough to die for you, who has plans for your future that are so great He says you can’t imagine it (1 Corinthians 2:9)?

Religion can become a ritual when our hearts are not involved. Israel grew tired of their offerings because they would not consider what the offerings represented. They lost a heart of gratitude for deliverance from Egypt, for a land of their own, for fields they did not clear and houses they did not build, for victories over their enemies, for the revelation of God through the prophets, and for being the guardians of the Word of God and His promises to man (Deuteronomy 6:10-12).

The lack of offerings just represented their lack of gratitude for all God did and was doing. The same can be true with us. Some people are excited to give. Others give grudgingly. Our attitude toward giving is directly related to our understanding of what God has done for us and our willingness to respond from a heart of gratitude (2 Corinthians 9:7). Have you ever just spontaneously emptied your wallet into the offering out of sheer gratitude? Some people have realized it really is more blessed to give than receive (Acts 20:35).

*23 You have not brought me your sheep for burnt offerings, or honored me with your sacrifices. I have not burdened you with offerings, or wearied you with frankincense. 24 You have not bought me sweet cane with money, or satisfied me with the fat of your sacrifices. But you have burdened me with your sins; you have wearied me with your iniquities.* Isaiah 43:23-24 God declares that He had not burdened them, but they had burdened Him. Instead of offerings of gratitude, there was rebellion, sin, and iniquity. This was the history of Israel to this point, but grace was still being extended to them (Psalm 89:30-34).

This may be your history to this point, but if you are still breathing, God is extending grace to you this morning. Repent! Call on the name of the Lord and be saved. Like Israel, you can go from being a burden to God to being a witness of His glory. He made you for Himself. Nothing else will fill the void in your heart.

*25 “I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.* Isaiah 43:25 Only the one offended can offer forgiveness to the offender. God can forgive because He provides justice for our sin through Jesus’ sacrificial death in our place. It is not only love that sent Jesus, it is for God's own sake. He must be consistent with His perfect nature and that includes grace and mercy. He is also preparing a bride for His Son (Ephesians 5:31-32). We receive forgiveness and are transformed. He gets a pure and spotless bride for Jesus. She is the redeemed people of God.

Notice that God said He would remember our sin no more. Only God can chose to forget! We try to forget, but He does (Isaiah 38:17)! If you bring up your old sins which you have repented of and forsaken, He won't know what you are referring to! Hallelujah! Maybe you don’t have an ugly past and can’t say, “Hallelujah!” as heartily as some us. You can thank God for that (Luke 7:47)! In reference to the idea that someone can have a good heart without Jesus, Chambers wrote in today’s devotion: “If I have never been a blackguard, the reason is a mixture of cowardice and the protection of a civilized life; but when I am undressed before God, I find that Jesus Christ is right in his diagnosis.”1

*26 Put me in remembrance; let us argue together; set forth your case, that you may be proved right.* Isaiah 43:26 It's not because of your holiness or anything you have done that caused God to redeem and forgive you (Ephesians 2:8-9). Like the Jews, we come from a long line of rebels, as the following verses point out.

*27 Your first father sinned, and your mediators transgressed against me. 28 Therefore I will profane the princes of the sanctuary, and deliver Jacob to utter destruction and Israel to reviling.* Isaiah 43:27-28 The first father may be Adam or Abraham, either way, both sinned. Every mediator transgressed: Abraham, Moses, David, priests, every single ancestor.

While God is speaking to future captives, verse 28 shows they have not gone into captivity yet. Those who think it was written by a later author during the captivity have to explain this fact away.

The passage would find a second fulfillment when the Jews reject the Suffering Servant. And yet, there is still hope. The next chapter begins with what Jesus referred to as “the promise of the Father” and looks forward to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit who can change our hearts so that we can live for the purpose for which we were created, the glory of the Lord and to declare His praise (Isaiah 43:7).

*1 “But now hear, O Jacob my servant, Israel whom I have chosen! 2 Thus says the LORD who made you, who formed you from the womb and will help you: Fear not, O Jacob my servant, Jeshurun whom I have chosen.* Isaiah 44:1-2 Jeshurun is another name for Israel (Deuteronomy 32:15). In spite of their just punishment of captivity for the sins of generations of rebellion and ingratitude, God has chosen to show mercy *again* and help them. He has not forsaken those whom He has chosen and that is why they need not fear.

It was God who selected your specific DNA according to the good plan He has for your life (Ephesians 2:10). He reiterated in these verses that Israel is a chosen people. Someone has said that everyone who chooses to be chosen is chosen. The mystery of God’s sovereignty and freewill is deep, but that simple idea bears consideration. If you choose to be chosen then you must be chosen for everyone who asks receives. Everyone who seeks finds (Matthew 7:8).

*3 For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.* Isaiah 44:3 What the Jews were unable to do, the Holy Spirit would give them the power to do, to be the witnesses God intended them to be, to live for God's glory (Acts 1:8). This is the promise of the Father for which Jesus, before He ascended, told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem to receive (Acts 1:4).

Peter could have quoted this verse in his first sermon to explain to the crowd at Pentecost what was taking place, in addition to Joel 2:28-32 . Isaiah is clearly predicting the time when the Spirit is poured out to empower us to be the witnesses God meant us to be and to change our hearts.

*4 They shall spring up among the grass like willows by flowing streams.* Isaiah 44:4 New life! Born again (John 3:3)! Flourishing like the tree in Psalm One by the rivers of water that brings forth fruit. As Jesus said, *14 but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."* John 4:14 (NIV) This is the promise to those who meditate on God’s Word and receive His Spirit, not just life, but vibrant, fruit bearing, abundant life (John 10:10)!

*5 This one will say, ‘I am the LORD’s,’ another will call on the name of Jacob,* *and another will write on his hand, ‘The LORD’s,’ and name himself by the name of Israel.”* Isaiah 44:5 Well, is there anyone who will boldly declare it? "I am the Lord's!" My life belongs to Him! Does anyone here call on the name of Jacob? By that I believe God means that you recognize you were a deceiver but know that if God could change Jacob into one who prevails with God, then He can do it in you? If He could take the rebellious line of Israel and bring about the Messiah and twelve Apostles and the early church, there is hope for any and all!

Will you write on your hand, "The LORD's"?  If you have to have a tatoo, how about this one right on the top of your right hand? To be named Israel means more than just a given name, but can mean faith to be a new creation in Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17).

In this chapter we've gone from depths of the sins of generations to declaring by faith in Jesus' atonement that we prevail with God. We've gone from the depths of the past that God will forget, to being the bride of Christ. Glory to God! We’ve gone from realizing we are Jacob to knowing we are Israel. We’ve gone from the depths of hell to the heights of heaven, from being God’s enemy to being the bride of Christ, all by His mercy, all by His grace, because He loves us so! Now declare His praise by your life and your words. Glory to God!

Questions

1 Why is God reminding them of the past?

2 Why does He then say forget the past?

3 Why did God make us?

4 What were the Jews weary of?

5 How was that expressed?

6 Why did God forgive our sins?

7 Why did God send Jesus?

8 Who can choose to not remember?

9 Why do we need the Holy Spirit?

10 What’s on your hand?